

(19)

Europäisches Patentamt

European Patent Office

Office européen des brevets



(11)

EP 1 045 547 A2

(12)

EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION

(43) Date of publication:

18.10.2000 Bulletin 2000/42

(51) Int. Cl.⁷: H04L 12/24, G06F 17/30

(21) Application number: 00301826.4

(22) Date of filing: 06.03.2000

(84) Designated Contracting States:

AT BE CH CY DE DK ES FI FR GB GR IE IT LI LU
MC NL PT SE

Designated Extension States:

AL LT LV MK RO SI

(30) Priority: 09.03.1999 US 324747

03.06.1999 US 349325

(71) Applicant: Netzero, Inc.

Westlake Village, California 91361 (US)

(72) Inventors:

- Haitsuka, Stacy
California (US)

• Zebian, Marwan

California (US)

• MacKenzie, Harold

California (US)

• Burr, Ronald

California (US)

• Warren, Terry

California (US)

• Blaser, Shane

California (US)

(74) Representative:

Wombwell, Francis

Potts, Kerr & Co.

15, Hamilton Square

Birkenhead Merseyside CH41 6BR (GB)

(54) Monitoring of individual internet usage

(57) Disclosed is a device and method in which the on-line activities of an on-line user are monitored and stored. Information regarding the user's activities are used as a basis for targeting advertisements to the user. Monitoring is performed by a client monitoring application, which performs monitoring without intruding on the user's activities. According to one aspect of the invention, URLs in the address bar of the browser application

are obtained by the client monitoring application. According to another aspect of the invention, the stream of URLs transmitted by the browser application are obtained by the client monitoring application. According to another aspect of the invention, information in displayed web pages is obtained by the client monitoring application.

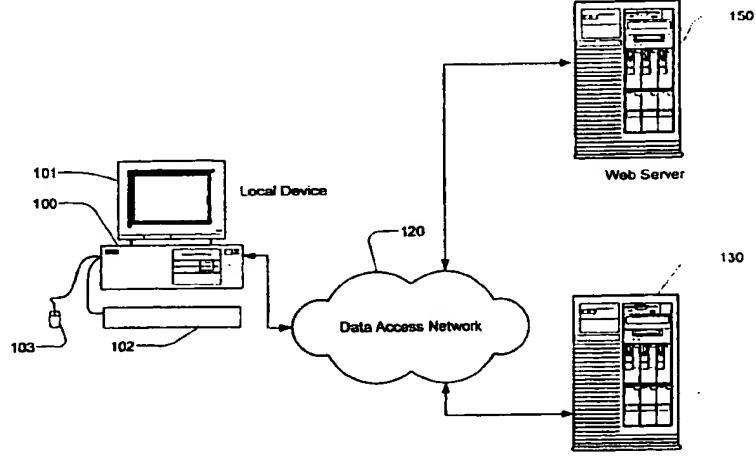


Figure 1

Description**NOTICE OF COPYRIGHTS AND TRADE DRESS**

[0001] A portion of the disclosure of this patent document contains material, which is subject to copyright protection. This patent document may show and/or describe matter, which is or may become trade dress of the owner. The copyright and trade dress owner has no objection to the facsimile reproduction by any one of the patent disclosure, as it appears in the Patent and Trademark Office patent files or records, but otherwise reserves all copyright and trade dress rights whatsoever.

RELATED APPLICATION INFORMATION

[0002] This application is related to Application No. 09/265,512 filed March 9, 1999 entitled "Network Data Distribution Based Upon User-Specific Qualities," which is incorporated herein by reference, and which is a continuation-in-part of Application No. 60/077,331 filed March 9, 1998 entitled "Network Data Distribution Based Upon Geographic Location, Usage Patterns, Interactive Data, Profile Data, Demographic Data and Scheduling Information."

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION*1. Field Of The Invention*

[0003] The present invention relates to monitoring the activity of a user of a data network, such as the Internet.

2. Description Of Related Art

[0004] Online services today offer a variety of services to their users. Users may access news, weather, financial, sports, and entertainment services, participate in and retrieve information from online discussion groups, and send and receive email. A user of an online service typically accesses the service using specialized communication software (i.e., client application or client software) that establishes and manages a connection from the user's computer (or client) to the service provider's host computers (or servers) and facilitates the user's interactions with the service.

[0005] In addition to managing the connection, there is provided software to display pages or screens relating to retrieved content according to views or presentations specific to the online service. This software may be integrated with the client application. The functionality of the content and the user interface (i.e., icons, dialog boxes, menus, etc.) for interacting with the content are typically dictated by various standards.

[0006] Interactions between the user's computer and the service are facilitated by a variety of software

protocols (i.e., communication conventions, rules and structures), including application level protocols, for managing the transfer of data across the network and to the client application on the user's computer. A protocol **5** may be proprietary or exclusive to a service such that only client software from the service provider may be used to communicate with the server software. For example, an online service that supports electronic mail, discussion groups, chat groups, news services, **10** etc. may define and use specific protocols for each type of service so that appropriate information is exchanged between the participants (i.e., clients and servers). Each application-specific protocol may be based on a common, underlying protocol.

[0007] The Internet and World Wide Web ("web"), comprised of a vast array of international computer networks, provide online service users with considerable information resources and other content. Typically, this content is accessed using a web browser, such as **20** Microsoft Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator, capable of understanding the HyperText Markup Language (HTML) used to create the documents found on the web and the HyperText Transfer Protocol (HTTP) used to navigate the web. Email and Usenet discussion **25** groups are typically accessed through companion software to the browser. Although web browsers typically have varying levels of functionality or sophistication, retrieved content is displayed in content pages according to views or presentations specific to the web document **30** currently presented by the web browser. Typically, the views and presentations are different than those provided by the communication software from the online service because the web browser is, in fact, a separate client application displaying web documents containing **35** presentation directives.

[0008] When using a browser, the browser issues HTTP messages to request web pages. A requested web page is typically identified using its URL — uniform **40** resource locator. The URL is a reference (or address) to a resource available on a TCP/IP network such as the Internet. A URL is composed of a character string, and may have a number of parts. These parts include a top level domain name, second level domain name, directory name, and file name. URLs may identify a file **45** located on a web server. URLs may also point to other resources on the network such as database queries and command output. The determination and use of URLs is well known in the art and is not discussed further herein.

[0009] In some portions of this disclosure, the term "resource locator" is used. The term is defined as a string or code which uniquely identifies a resource on a network. Thus, the URL is a species of resource locator.

[0010] There are a number of ways that a user can **55** connect to the Internet. First, a user can subscribe to a proprietary on-line network, such as, for example, America Online. Second, a user can subscribe to an Internet Service Provider (ISP). In any case, users typi-

cally connect to the Internet using a computer with a communications device such as an analog modem, an Ethernet adapter, DSL adapter or cable modem. Such connections may be analog or digital, dial-up or constantly-connected.

[0011] Subscribers typically pay a fee for their subscriptions to proprietary non-line networks and ISPs. These fees typically are in the form of a sign-up fee, plus on-line charges which are fixed (i.e., unlimited monthly access for a fixed fee) or based upon the amount of time the user is connected. The fees generally increase with bandwidth.

[0012] There are at least three ways in which the client monitoring application 110 can obtain information about the individuals' use of his browser: (1) by monitoring URLs in the address bar of the browser application 160, (2) by monitoring the stream of URLs transmitted by the browser application 160 to the data access network 120, and (3) by grabbing information from the browser application's display pane 210. Each of these three techniques is described below in turn with reference to Figure 5.

[0013] On-line and Internet content and service providers often derive revenue by displaying advertisements to users. For example, when a user accesses a web page on the Web, an advertisement may be displayed to the user as part of the web page. Advertisements are also shown to users of some proprietary on-line services. Often in such systems, each user accessing a certain screen or site is shown the same advertisement. Sophisticated systems have the capability to change the advertisement after a certain period of time.

[0014] Advertisers find it desirable to target advertisements to relevant potential customers. For example, an advertiser of stockings would prefer to target women rather than men with its advertising. A Boston restaurant would prefer to target residents of Boston and business travelers rather than children living in San Francisco. Moreover, advertisers prefer to pay for advertising based upon the number of relevant consumers who are actually exposed to the advertisement. For typical on-line systems and networks, including the Web, it is often difficult for an advertiser to precisely determine whether its advertisements were actually viewed by a user and for how long, and whether the advertisement induced a response. Accordingly, there exists a need for a targeted advertisement system that also can provide information as to the characteristics of those who were exposed to each advertisement, for how long the user was exposed, and at what times.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0015] In accordance with the present invention, the on-line activities of an on-line user are monitored and stored. Information regarding the user's activities are used as a basis for targeting advertisements to the user. Monitoring is performed by a client monitoring applica-

tion, which performs monitoring without intruding on the user's activities.

[0016] According to one aspect of the invention, URLs in the address bar of the browser application are obtained by the client monitoring application. According to a second aspect of the invention, the stream of URLs transmitted by the browser application are obtained by the client monitoring application. According to a third aspect of the invention, information in displayed web pages is obtained by the client monitoring application.

[0017] Still further objects and advantages attaching to the system and to its use and cooperation will be apparent to those skilled in the art from the following particular description.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0018] Further objects of this invention, together with additional features contributing thereto and advantages accruing therefrom, will be apparent from the following description of a preferred embodiment of the present invention which is shown in the accompanying drawings with like reference numerals indicating corresponding parts throughout and which is to be read in conjunction with the following drawings, wherein:

Figure 1 is a first block diagram of a network data distribution system in accordance with the invention.

Figure 2 is a second block diagram of a network data distribution system in accordance with the present invention.

Figure 3 is a flow chart of a method of distributing data in a network in accordance with the invention. Figure 4 is a flow chart of a method of monitoring web browsing by a user in accordance with the invention.

Figure 5 is a screen shot of a second window displayed by a browser application.

Figure 6 is a screen shot of a third window displayed by a browser application.

Figures 7A, 7B and 7C are flow charts of several techniques for obtaining information about a requested web page in accordance with the invention.

[0019] These and additional embodiments of the invention may now be better understood by turning to the following detailed description wherein an illustrated embodiment is described.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0020] Throughout this description, the preferred embodiment and examples shown should be considered as exemplars, rather than limitations on the apparatus and methods of the present invention.

The System of the Invention

[0021] The system of the invention enables data to be sent to individuals based upon: the individual's geographic location; the individual's interactive data; the individual's network usage data; the individual's personal profile information; the scheduling requirements of the data to be sent; and the demographic requirements of the data to be sent.

[0022] Referring now to Figure 1, there is shown a block diagram of a network data distribution system in accordance with the invention in conjunction with a source of web pages. Figure 1 includes a local device 100, a data access network 120, a monitoring server 130 and a web server 150. The local device 100, the data access network 120 and the monitoring server 130 comprise the network data distribution system.

[0023] The local device 100 preferably comprises a client computer which is configured to access the monitoring server 130 via the local access network 120. The client computer may be, for example, a PC running a Microsoft Windows operating system. The local device 100 preferably includes an output device, such as display 101, and an input device, such as keyboard 102 and / or pointing device 103 (e.g., mouse, track ball, light pen, or data glove). The local device 100 may also be, for example, an Internet appliance, network computer (NC), or an appropriately Internet-enabled device such as a portable digital assistant (PDA), mobile phone, refrigerator, etc. The particular type of device of the local device 100 is not considered to be important so long as the local device 100 provides some measure of individual user interactivity with a source of web pages.

[0024] The data access network 120 provides lower layer network support for the local device 100 to interact with the monitoring server 130 and the web server 150. The data access network 120 preferably comprises a common or private bi-directional telecommunications network (e.g., a public switched telephone network (PSTN), a cable-based telecommunication network, a LAN, a WAN, a wireless network), coupled with or overlaid by a TCP/IP network (e.g., the Internet or an intranet).

[0025] The web server 150 may be of the type known in the art and has the ability to serve web pages to the local device 100, as requested in the manner known in the art. It should be appreciated that the web server 150 is generic for any source of web pages available to the local device 100. Thus, for example, the web server 150 could be accessible from the Internet, or it could be a part of an intranet and represents any number of web servers.

[0026] The monitoring server 130 preferably is a computer system, such as a server computer. The monitoring server 130 acts as a recipient of certain information transmitted by the local device 100, as described further below. The monitoring server 130 preferably also

transmits certain data to the local device 100 as described further below.

[0027] A browser application, such as Microsoft Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator is preferably installed on the local device 100. When the local device 100 is connected to the web server 150 through the data access network 120, the user of the local device browses the web server 150 from the local device 100 using the browser application. The browser application itself need not be stored on the local device 100. The important aspect is that the user, from the local device 100, can exercise control over what web pages are requested and thus displayed by the local device 100.

[0028] Referring now to Figure 2, there is shown a window 400 generated by a browser application, here Microsoft Internet Explorer. The browser window 400 is familiar to those skilled in the art, so the particulars are not described further herein. Further information regarding the use of most browser applications and their technical specifications is abundantly available.

[0029] Several aspects of the browser window 400 are identified for further reference below. These aspects include a display pane 410, an address bar 420 and a title bar 430. The display pane 410 is a region of the browser window 400 wherein the browser application causes web pages received by the browser application to be displayed. The address bar 420 is another region of the browser window 400 and the browser application displays URLs in the address bar 420 corresponding to the web page currently displayed in the display pane 410. The user can also enter a URL into the address bar 420, and the browser application will attempt to load the web page or other object to which the entered URL points. The primary feature of the title bar 430 is that it displays the title of the browser application. Another feature of most browsers is that the title bar 430 displays the title of the web page then displayed in the display pane 410.

[0030] Some browser applications permit the address bar to be hidden. However, even if the address bar is hidden, the browser application will copy the URL of a requested web page into an object corresponding to the displayed address bar. For this reason, references herein to the term "address bar" refers either the address bar display 420 or the address bar object, depending on the context. One of skill in the art will appreciate the proper meaning of the term depending on its context. However, in general, the address bar display is indicated with its reference number, 420.

[0031] Referring now to Figure 3, there is shown a block diagram of a network data distribution system in accordance with the present invention. The system comprises a client monitoring application 110, the data access network 120, the monitoring server 130 and data stores 140a-g (collectively, 140). A browser application 160 is also shown. The client monitoring application 110 is a program operative on local device 100, and preferably an independent application program or a

DLL. The client monitoring application 110 preferably retrieves certain network data, displays certain network data, transmits geographic location data, transmits interactive user data, transmits network usage data and transmits personal profile information as described above. The client monitoring application is preferably a fully-featured client application which also sets up and maintains the connection to the data access network 120. The data stores 140 store and provide this geographic information data 140d, network usage data 140a, interactive usage data 140b, personal profile information 140g, data to be sent 140e, schedule for transmitting data 140f and demographics for transmitting data 140c.

[0032] Each time an individual uses the local device 100 to connect to the data access network 120, the client monitoring application 110 and the monitoring server establish a session. In this session, the client monitoring application 110 transmits certain information regarding the user of the local device 100 and his use of the local device 100 while connected to the data access network 120. The monitoring server 130, on the other hand, uses the information from the client monitoring application 100 to determine information which should be sent to the client monitoring application 110. Preferably, the information from the client monitoring application 110 is used by the monitoring server 130 to select advertisements to the local device 100. The client monitoring application then causes these advertisements to be displayed on the local device's output device 101.

[0033] The information from the client monitoring application 110 regarding the user preferably includes geographic data and personal profile information. Geographic data indicating the user's current location preferably is sent from the client monitoring application 110 to the monitoring server 130, which then stores the geographic data in the data store 140d. This geographic data can be something simple, like a phone number. The user preferably provides personal profile information on a periodic basis which is stored in the data store 140g and used by the monitoring server 130. This information consists of (but is not limited to) things such as: age, sex, marriage status, home address and personal interests.

[0034] The information regarding the user's use of the local device 100 includes email and web usage and advertisement click-throughs. The user's interactions and feedback with the web server 150 provided through the browser application 160 are preferably captured by the client monitoring application 110, analyzed by the monitoring server 130 and stored in the data store 140b. This includes the user's feedback and responses to the data delivered to the browser application 160. The user's activities on the web server 150 provided through the browser application 160 are preferably captured by the client monitoring application 110, analyzed by the monitoring server 130 and stored in the data store 140a. This includes the type of network data the users

requests and accesses. This data is preferably summarized and classified into multiple demographic profiles.

[0035] The data to be sent to users preferably has scheduling requirements that dictate when it should be sent. These scheduling requirements include (but are not limited to): frequency, maximum number of times to send to an individual, minimum number of times to send to an individual, time of day to send, and first and last days to send. The data to be sent to users can have demographic requirements that dictate to whom it should be sent. These include (but are not limited to): personal profile, interactive data, network usage information and geographic location.

15 The Methods of the Invention

[0036] Referring now to Figure 4, there is shown a flow chart of a method of distributing data in a network in accordance with the invention. The components 110, 120, 130, 140 work together to deliver data that meets the geographic and demographic criteria.

[0037] After the method begins (step 405), the user preferably uses the client monitoring application 110 to connect to the data access network 120, and then the monitoring server 130 (step 410). If this is the first time the user has connected (step 415), then the user is required to submit personal profile information (step 420). Preferably, the monitoring server 130 periodically will request (step 425) that the client monitoring application 110 have the individual update this profile (step 430). Each time the local device 100 connects to the monitoring server 130, the client monitoring application 110 preferably sends data indicating the local device's current geographic location to the monitoring server 130 (step 435).

[0038] Once connected, a number of processes are started (step 440). In one of these processes, whenever the user interacts with data received on the client monitoring application 110, the client monitoring application 110 sends feedback information respecting this interaction to the monitoring server 120. The monitoring server 120 then summarizes and classifies the feedback information into multiple demographic profiles, and stores these profiles in the data store 140.

[0039] In another of these processes, whenever an individual uses the browser application 160 to request or access data from the web server 150, the client monitoring application 110 sends feedback information respecting these requests and data accesses to the monitoring server 130. The monitoring server 130 then summarizes and classifies this feedback information into multiple demographic profiles, and stores these profiles in the data store 140.

[0040] In another of these processes, while a user's local device 100 is connected to the web server 150, the monitoring server 130 determines which targeted data needs to be sent to the client monitoring application 110 and then transmits this targeted data to the client moni-

toring application 110. The monitoring server 130 accomplishes this by:

examining the scheduling requirements to determine which data needs to be sent;

examining the demographic requirements of the data to determine to which demographic profiles the data needs to be sent;

selecting the users who are currently connected that meet the demographic requirements of the data; and

sending the data to the selected users.

[0041] As mentioned, one of the processes relates to the user's use of his browser application 160.

[0042] In the first step of the method, the client monitoring application 110 is activated on the local device 100 (step 510). The client monitoring application 100 may be installed during manufacture of the local device 100, during use of the local device 100 at the instigation of the user, or may occur automatically as a consequence of other processes. Although at least some aspects of the client monitoring application 110 should be operable from the local device 100, the client monitoring application 100 need not be stored on the local device 100 and can be run from a remote location.

[0043] In the next step of the method, the browser application 160 is activated on the local device 100 (step 515). The browser application 160 may be activated manually, or automatically by a script or through commands issued by the client monitoring application 110. It should be appreciated that the browser application 160 may be activated prior to activation of the client monitoring application 110, though in such a case, the functionality of the client monitoring application 110 will not be available as described below with respect to grabbing URLs from the address bar 220.

[0044] In the next step, the user requests that the browser application 160 display a desired web page (step 520). This may occur in at least three different ways, which are discussed with reference to Figure 6. Figure 6 shows the browser window 200 with a web page 610. The address bar 220 displays the URL for the displayed web page 610, www.arterhadden.com/alpha.htm. The displayed web page 610 includes a number of common features to web pages. These features are hyperlinks such as hyperlink 620, buttons such as button 630, and data entry fields such as data entry field 640. Those of ordinary skill in the art appreciate the design of web pages and the functionality of hyperlinks, buttons and data entry fields, so these features are not described further herein.

[0045] One way for the user to request that the browser application display a desired web page is to

enter a URL into the address bar 220. For example, to display the web page 610, the user could use the keyboard 102 to type the URL www.arterhadden.com/alpha.htm into the address bar 220. Alternatively, the user could paste the URL into the address bar 220, or use automated means such a script.

[0046] A second way for the user to request that the browser application 160 display a desired web page is to activate a hyperlink displayed on the currently displayed page. For example, to go to the home page on the Arter & Hadden LLP web site, the user could use the pointing device 103 to activate (e.g., click with his mouse on) the hyperlink 620.

[0047] A third way for the user to request that the browser application 160 display a desired web page is through entry of a keyword into a data entry field in a web page displayed in the display pane 210. For example, to search for an attorney with the firm of Arter & Hadden LLP, the user could use the keyboard 102 to type the attorney's last name into the data entry field 640 and click on the Search button 630. It is well known that some data entry fields may be activated by simply typing keywords into the data entry field and typing Enter, and this is also within the scope of the invention.

[0048] Other features that are used for the user to request a desired web page are within the scope of the invention, such as pull-down lists and scroll boxes. It should also be appreciated that a displayed web page may be a static or a dynamic page.

[0049] Returning now to the method of Figure 5, in the next step, the monitoring application 110 obtains identifying information about the requested web page (step 530). As mentioned above, there are at least three techniques for obtaining information about a requested web page, and these techniques are further described with respect to Figures 8A, 8B and 8C, respectively.

[0050] According to the first technique, the client monitoring application 110 grabs URLs from the address bar. In this technique, after the user requests that the browser application 160 display a desired web page (step 520), the browser application 160 inserts in the address bar the URL corresponding to the web page desired by the user (step 810). This is a normal part of the operation of browser applications such as Microsoft Internet Explorer and Netscape Navigator.

[0051] With respect to the example of Figure 6, if the keyword "sereboff" is entered into the data entry field 640, and the user clicks on the Search button 630, the browser application will display a new web page in the display pane 210, such as web page 710 shown in Figure 7. In both Microsoft Internet Explorer and Netscape Navigator, the browser application inserts the new URL in the address bar before actually displaying the page identified by the URL. As can be seen in Figure 7, the browser application has inserted the URL of the displayed web page 710 in the address bar 220. Figure 7 also shows a new title in the title bar 230 — that of the

currently displayed page. Whereas the web page of Figure 6 is entitled, "Arter & Hadden LLP — Attorney Search" and has the URL www.arterhadden.com/alpha.htm, the web page of Figure 7 is entitled, "Arter & Hadden LLP — Individual Profile" and has the URL www.arterhadden.com/attysearch.gw?s=serboff.

[0052] After the URL has been inserted into the address bar (step 810), the client monitoring application 110 copies the URL from the address bar (step 820). In the preferred embodiment, the client monitoring application monitors the title bar 230. This can be done by setting an appropriate hook, in the manner known in the art. The client monitoring application recognizes if the title has changed, and if so, copies the new URL from the address bar. Other techniques for recognizing that the URL in the address bar have changed are within the scope of the invention.

[0053] According to the second technique for obtaining information about a requested web page, the client monitoring application 110 grabs URLs from the communications stream between the browser application 160 and the web server 150. In this technique, after the user requests that the browser application 160 display a desired web page (step 520), the browser application 160 transmits the URL of the desired web page to the web server 150 (step 830). The URL will be available within the local device 100 at a number of software and hardware levels, and the client monitoring application 110 can set hooks or create traps at any of these levels as may be desired. After the URL is transmitted from the browser application 160 (step 830), the client monitoring application 110 copies the URL from the transmission (step 840).

[0054] According to the third technique for obtaining information about a requested web page, the client monitoring application 110 grabs information from the browser application's display pane 210, or the object corresponding to the display pane 210. In this technique, after the user requests that the browser application 160 display a desired web page (step 520), client monitoring application 110 determines if the displayed page (e.g., page 610) includes a data entry field (step 850). If not, then the client monitoring application 110 has nothing to do (step 860). However, if the displayed web page has a data entry field, then the client monitoring application 110 determines if the user has entered anything in the data entry field (step 870). If the user has not entered anything into the data entry field, then the client monitoring application 110 has nothing to do (step 860). However, if the user has entered keywords into the data entry field, then the client monitoring application 110 copies these keywords (step 880). There are a number of ways to test if a web page has a data entry field, and to copy entered keywords. These include screen scraping, parsing web pages received by the local device 100, copying keystrokes, etc. If the user selects a hyperlink, the client monitoring application 110

can obtain the URL associated with the hyperlink from the HTML source of the displayed page having the hyperlink.

[0055] After the client monitoring application 110 obtains the information about the requested web page (step 530), the client monitoring application 110 parses the copied information, and derives monitoring information from the copied information (step 535). As described above, the client monitoring application 110 will have grabbed a URL, keywords, or other information. The particular nature of the monitoring information is not critical to the present invention. However, in the preferred embodiment, the monitoring information is used for targeting advertising to the user. Thus, useful information which is desirable for monitoring includes the top level domain name and the second level domain name. Other useful information are keywords entered by the user into data entry fields.

[0056] For some URLs, such as search engines, the keywords are particularly useful. The client monitoring application 110 preferably recognizes when the user is browsing a search engine, and in such a case grabs the search terms (keywords) entered by the user in the search box (data entry field). The client monitoring application 110 preferably can recognize the major search engines from their second level domain names, e.g. "yahoo," "excite," "altavista," "lycos," "infoseek" and "go".

[0057] In some embodiments, it might be desirable for the client monitoring application 110 to transmit the entire URL to the monitoring server 130.

[0058] With the monitoring information derived (step 535), the client monitoring application 110 next transmits the monitoring information to the monitoring server 130 (step 540). In some embodiments, the monitoring information should be transmitted in a coded or secure format. Furthermore, in some embodiments, the monitoring information should be transmitted in a batch form. The process then loops back to step 520 and continues until the client monitoring application 110 or the browser application 160 is de-activated (e.g., closed).

[0059] As can be seen, this process permits browsing by the user, and monitoring of that browsing, without interfering with the user's use of the browser application.

[0060] Although exemplary embodiments of the present invention have been shown and described, it will be apparent to those having ordinary skill in the art that a number of changes, modifications, or alterations to the invention as described herein may be made, none of which depart from the spirit of the present invention. All such changes, modifications and alterations should therefore be seen as within the scope of the present invention.

Claims

1. A method of monitoring web browsing by a user,

wherein the user browses by means of a browser application on a client computer, the client computer comprising a display and an input device, the browser application for generating a browser window on the display and for requesting web pages, the browser window including a display pane and an address bar, the display pane comprising a first region of the browser window wherein the browser application causes web pages obtained by the browser application to be displayed, the address bar comprising a second region of the browser window through which the browser application displays resource locator strings corresponding to displayed web pages, the method comprising the steps of:

- (a) activating a client monitoring application on the client computer;
- (b) the browser application activating on the client computer;
- (c) the user using the input device and the browser application to request a first web page desired by the user from a web server;
- (d) the browser application displaying a first resource locator string corresponding to the first web page in the address bar;
- (e) the client monitoring application copying the first resource locator string from the address bar; and
- (f) the client monitoring application transmitting monitoring information derived from the copied resource locator string to a monitoring server; whereby browsing by the user is monitored without interfering with the user's use of the browser application.

2. The method of monitoring web browsing by a user as set forth in claim 1, wherein the input device comprises a keyboard, and the method further comprises, in the step of the user using the input device and the browser application to request the first web page, the user using the keyboard to enter the first resource locator string into the address bar.

3. The method of monitoring web browsing by a user as set forth in claim 1, wherein the input device comprises a pointing device, and the method further comprises:

after the step of the browser application activating on the client computer, the browser application displaying a second web page in the display pane, the display pane including a hyperlink, wherein the hyperlink is associated with the first resource locator string; and in the step of the user using the input device and the browser application to request the first web page, the user using the pointing device to click on the hyperlink;

wherein the browser application displays the first resource locator string in the address bar in response to the user using the mouse to click on the hyperlink.

5

4. The method of monitoring web browsing by a user as set forth in claim 1, the method further comprising:

10 after the step of the browser application activating on the client computer, the browser application displaying a second web page in the display pane, the display pane including a data entry field; and

15 in the step of the user using the input device and the browser application to request the first web page, the user using the input device to enter a keyword into the data entry field; whereby the first resource locator string includes the keyword.

20

5. The method of monitoring web browsing by a user as set forth in claim 1, wherein the web server is part of the Internet.

25

6. The method of monitoring web browsing by a user as set forth in claim 1, wherein the first resource locator string comprises a top level domain name and a second level domain name, and wherein the monitoring information comprises the top level domain name and the second level domain name.

30

7. The method of monitoring web browsing by a user as set forth in claim 1, wherein the web server is part of an intranet.

35

8. A method of monitoring web browsing by a user, wherein the user browses by means of a browser application on a client computer, the client computer comprising a display and an input device, the browser application for generating a browser window on the display, the browser window including a display pane, the browser application further for requesting web pages and displaying web pages in the display pane, wherein the user causes the browser application to request web pages through use of the input device, the method comprising the steps of:

40

50 (a) activating a client monitoring application on the client computer;

55 (b) the browser application activating on the client computer;

(c) the user using the input device to identify to the browser application a desired first web page;

(d) the browser application transmitting a first resource locator string corresponding to the

desired first web page to a first web server;

(e) the client monitoring application copying the first resource locator string from the transmission by the browser application of the first resource locator string to the first web server; and

(f) the client monitoring application transmitting monitoring information derived from the copied first resource locator string to a monitoring server;

whereby browsing by the user is monitored without interfering with the user's use of the browser application.

5

9. The method of monitoring web browsing by a user as set forth in claim 8,
 wherein the browser window further includes an address bar, the address bar comprising a second region of the browser window through which the browser application receives resource locator strings entered by the user, and the resource locator strings entered by the user correspond to web pages which the user desires to be displayed in the display pane;

20

10. The method of monitoring web browsing by a user as set forth in claim 8, wherein the input device comprises a pointing device, and the method further comprises,
 after the step of the browser application activating on the client computer, the browser application displaying a second web page in the display pane, the display pane including a hyperlink, wherein the hyperlink is associated with the first resource locator string; and
 in the step of the user using the input device and the browser application to request the first web page, the user using the pointing device to click on the hyperlink;
 wherein the browser application displays the first resource locator string in the address bar in response to the user using the mouse to click on the hyperlink.

25

11. The method of monitoring web browsing by a user as set forth in claim 8, the method further comprising:
 (a) after the step of the browser application activating on the client computer, the browser application displaying a second web page,

30

12. The method of monitoring web browsing by a user as set forth in claim 11,
 wherein the second web page includes a data entry field;

(b) in the step of the user using the input device to identify to the browser application the desired first web page, the user using the input device to enter a keyword into the data entry field;

(c) in the step of the browser application transmitting the first string to the web server, the first resource locator string including the keyword;

(d) in the step of the client monitoring application transmitting the monitoring information, the monitoring information identifying the keyword.

35

13. The method of monitoring web browsing by a user as set forth in claim 0, wherein the source of web pages comprises the Internet.

40

14. The method of monitoring web browsing by a user as set forth in claim 8, wherein the first resource locator string comprises a top level domain name and a second level domain name, and wherein the monitoring information transmitted by the client monitoring application comprises the top level domain name and the second level domain name.

45

15. The method of monitoring web browsing by a user as set forth in claim 8, wherein the source of web pages comprises an intranet.

50

16. A method of monitoring web browsing by a user, wherein the user browses by means of a browser application on a client computer, the client computer comprising a display and an input device, the browser application for generating a browser window on the display, the browser window including a display pane, the browser application further for requesting web pages and displaying web pages in the display pane, wherein the user causes the browser application to request web pages through use of the input device, the method comprising the steps of:

55

(a) activating a client monitoring application on the client computer;
 (b) the browser application activating on the client computer;
 (c) the browser application receiving a first web page from a first web server, the first web page comprising a data entry field;
 (d) the browser application displaying the first web page in the display pane;
 (e) the user using the input device to enter a keyword into the data entry field;
 (f) the client monitoring application copying the keyword from the displayed first web page; and
 (g) the client monitoring application transmitting an identifier of the keyword to a predetermined server;
 whereby browsing by the user is monitored without interfering with the user's use of the browser application.

17. The method of monitoring web browsing by a user as set forth in claim 16, wherein the identifier comprises the keyword.

18. The method of monitoring web browsing by a user as set forth in claim 16, wherein the first web page has associated therewith a first resource locator string, the method further including the steps of:

the client monitoring application testing whether the first resource locator string includes a predefined second string;

if the first resource locator string includes the predefined second string, then performing the step of the client monitoring application copying the keyword from the displayed first web page, and otherwise omitting the steps of the client monitoring application copying the keyword and transmitting the identifier of the keyword.

19. The method of monitoring web browsing by a user as set forth in claim 18, wherein the first web server includes a search engine and the predefined second string identifies the search engine.

20. The method of monitoring web browsing by a user as set forth in claim 19, wherein the predefined second string is selected from the group consisting of: "yahoo," "excite," "altavista," "lycos," "infoseek" and "go."

21. A method of monitoring a user's usage of the Internet using a client monitoring application on a local device, the local device including an input device and an output device, the local device accessing the Internet and providing interaction with the Internet using a browser application operative on the local device, the browser application for generating a browser window on the output device and for requesting web pages, the browser window including a display pane and an address bar, the display pane comprising a first region of the browser window wherein the browser application causes web pages obtained by the browser application to be displayed, the address bar comprising a second region of the browser window through which the browser application displays resource locator strings corresponding to displayed web pages in the display pane, the method comprising the steps of:

(a) the user causing the local device to connect to a web server;
 (b) the client monitoring application establishing a communication link to a monitoring server;
 (c) the client monitoring application transmitting identifying information to the monitoring server;
 (d) the user identifying to the browser application a first web page desired by the user into the browser window's address bar using the input device wherein a first resource locator string is associated with the first web page;
 (e) the client monitoring application copying the first resource locator string from the address bar; and
 (f) the client monitoring application deriving monitoring information from the first resource locator string, the monitoring information comprising at least a part of the first resource locator string; and
 (g) the client monitoring application transmitting the monitoring information to the monitoring server.

22. The method of monitoring a user's usage of the Internet using a client monitoring application on a local device of claim 21, wherein the first resource locator string includes a second level domain name and the monitoring information includes the second level domain name.

23. The method of monitoring a user's usage of the Internet using a client monitoring application on a local device of claim 21, wherein the client monitoring application transmits the monitoring information to the monitoring server in a coded format.

24. A method of monitoring a user's usage of the Internet using a client monitoring application on a local device, the local device including an input device and an output device, the local device accessing the Internet and providing interaction with the Internet using a browser application operative on the local device, the browser application for generating a browser window on the output device and for requesting web pages, the browser window including a display pane and an address bar, the display pane comprising a first region of the browser window wherein the browser application causes web pages obtained by the browser application to be displayed, the address bar comprising a second region of the browser window through which the browser application displays resource locator strings corresponding to displayed web pages in the display pane, the method comprising the steps of:

local device, the method comprising the steps of:

- (a) the user causing the local device to connect to a first web server;
- (b) the client monitoring application establishing a communication link to a monitoring server;
- (c) the client monitoring application transmitting identifying information to the monitoring server;
- (d) the user using the input device, the output device and the browser application to interact with the first web server, wherein the browser application transmits resource locator strings to the first web server to request specific data from the first web server;
- (e) concurrently with the user interacting with the first web server, the client monitoring application monitoring the resource locator strings transmitted to the first web server;
- (f) the client monitoring application deriving monitoring information from each such resource locator string; and
- (g) the client monitoring application transmitting the monitoring information to the monitoring server string.

25. The method of monitoring a user's usage of the Internet using a client monitoring application on a local device of claim 24, wherein the resource locator string includes a second level domain name and the monitoring information includes the second level domain name.

26. The method of monitoring a user's usage of the Internet using a client monitoring application on a local device of claim 24, wherein the client monitoring application transmits the monitoring information to the monitoring server in a coded format.

27. A method of monitoring a user's usage of the Internet using a client application on a local device, the local device including an input device and an output device, the local device accessing the Internet and providing interaction with the Internet using a browser application operative on the local device, the method comprising the steps of:

- (a) the user causing the local device to connect to a first web server;
- (b) the client monitoring application establishing a communication link to a monitoring server;
- (c) the client monitoring application transmitting identifying information to the monitoring server;
- (d) the browser application displaying a first web page in the display pane, the first web page comprising a data entry field;
- (e) the user using the input device to enter a keyword into the data entry field;
- (f) the browser application transmitting a first resource locator string to the first web server, wherein the first resource locator string includes the keyword;
- (g) the client monitoring application copying the first resource locator string from the transmission by the browser application of the first resource locator string to the first web server; and
- (h) the client monitoring application testing whether the first resource locator includes a predefined second string; and
- (i) if the first resource locator string includes the predefined second string, then:
 - (1) the client monitoring application parsing the first resource locator string and deriving the keyword from the first resource locator string; and
 - (2) the client monitoring application transmitting monitoring information to the monitoring server, the monitoring information comprising at least a part of the first resource locator string.

35. The method of monitoring a user's usage of the Internet using a client monitoring application on a local device of claim 27, wherein the first resource locator string includes a second level domain name and the monitoring information includes the second level domain name.

40. The method of monitoring a user's usage of the Internet using a client monitoring application on a local device of claim 27, wherein the client monitoring application transmits the monitoring information to the monitoring server in a coded format.

45. The method of monitoring a user's usage of the Internet using a client monitoring application on a local device of claim 27, wherein the web server includes a search engine and the predefined second string identifies the search engine.

50. The method of monitoring a user's usage of the Internet using a client monitoring application on a local device of claim 27, wherein the second string includes a second level domain name selected from the group consisting of: "yahoo," "excite," "altavista," "lycos," "infoseek" and "go."

55. The method of monitoring a user's usage of the Internet using a client monitoring application on a local device of claim 30, wherein the second string includes a second level domain name selected from the group consisting of: "yahoo," "excite," "altavista," "lycos," "infoseek" and "go."

32. A local device comprising a display and an input device for providing browsing to a user by means of a browser application on a client computer, and further for monitoring web browsing by the user by means of a client application,

(a) the browser application comprising computer readable program code and operative on the local device for generating a browser window on the display and for requesting web pages, the browser window including a display pane comprising a first region of the browser window wherein the browser application causes web pages obtained by the browser application to be displayed, the displayed web pages having associated therewith respective resource locator strings, the browser application defining an address bar object in which, at any given time, the browser application stores the resource locator string corresponding to the then-displayed web page, the browser application comprising computer readable program code for causing the local device to:

- (1) accept a request by the user, using the input device, for the browser application to display a first web page from a web server;
- (2) request the first web page from the web server;
- (3) receive the first web page from the web server;
- (4) display the first web page in the display pane;
- (5) store in the address bar a first resource locator string corresponding to the first web page;

(b) the client application comprising computer readable program code for causing the local device to:

- (1) obtain the first resource locator string from the address bar object;
- (2) derive monitoring information from the first resource locator string;
- (3) transmit the monitoring information to a monitoring server;

whereby browsing by the user is monitored without interfering with the user's use of the browser application.

33. The local device as set forth in claim 32 wherein the input device comprises a keyboard, the browser application further comprises an address bar comprising a second region of the browser window in which the browser application displays the resource locator string corresponding to the ten-displayed

web page, the browser application further comprises computer readable program code for causing the local device to accept from the keyboard the user's entry of the first resource locator string into the address bar.

34. The local device as set forth in claim 32, wherein browser application includes computer readable program code for causing the local device to

display a second web page in the display pane, the displayed web page including a data entry field; and
accepting the user's entry of a keyword using the input device into the data entry field;
wherein the first resource locator string includes the keyword.

35. The local device as set forth in claim 32, wherein the web server is part of the Internet.

36. The local device as set forth in claim 35, wherein the first resource locator string comprises a top level domain name and a second level domain name, and wherein the monitoring information comprises the top level domain name and the second level domain name.

37. The local device as set forth in claim 32, wherein the web server is part of an intranet.

38. The local device as set forth in claim 32, the client monitoring application further comprising computer readable program code for causing the local device to:

establish a communication link to the monitoring server; and
transmit information identifying the user to the monitoring server.

39. The local device as set forth in claim 32, the client monitoring application further comprising computer readable, program code for encoding the monitoring information prior to transmitting the monitoring information to the monitoring server.

40. A computer program product comprising a computer usable medium having a client monitoring application comprising computer readable program code embodied therein for monitoring web browsing by a user of a local device, the user browsing on the local device by means of a browser application, the local device comprising a display and an input device, the browser application for generating a browser window on the display and for requesting and displaying web pages, wherein the displayed

web pages have associated therewith respective resource locator strings, the browser application defining an address bar object in which, at any given time, the browser application stores the resource locator string corresponding to the then-displayed web page, the client monitoring application comprising computer readable code for operating the local device to:

- (a) receive from the user information identifying the user to the monitoring server;
- (b) transmit the identifying information to the monitoring server to thereby establish a session with the monitoring server;
- (c) obtain a first resource locator string from the address bar object of the browser application;
- (d) derive monitoring information from the first resource locator string; and
- (e) transmit the monitoring information to the monitoring server.

5

10

15

20

41. The computer program product comprising a computer usable medium having a client monitoring application for monitoring web browsing by a user of a local device as set forth in claim 40, wherein the first resource locator string comprises a URL.

25

42. The computer program product comprising a computer usable medium having a client monitoring application for monitoring web browsing by a user of a local device as set forth in claim 41, wherein the monitoring information comprises a top level domain name and a second level domain name.

30

43. The computer program product comprising a computer usable medium having a client monitoring application for monitoring web browsing by a user of a local device as set forth in claim 40, wherein the resource locator strings for at least some of the displayed web pages include keywords, the client monitoring application further including computer readable code for operating the local device to:

35

40

- receive from the monitoring server a match string;
- test whether the first resource locator string includes the match string;
- if the first resource locator string includes the match string, then:

45

- test whether the resource locator string includes a keyword,
- if the resource locator string includes a keyword, then:

50

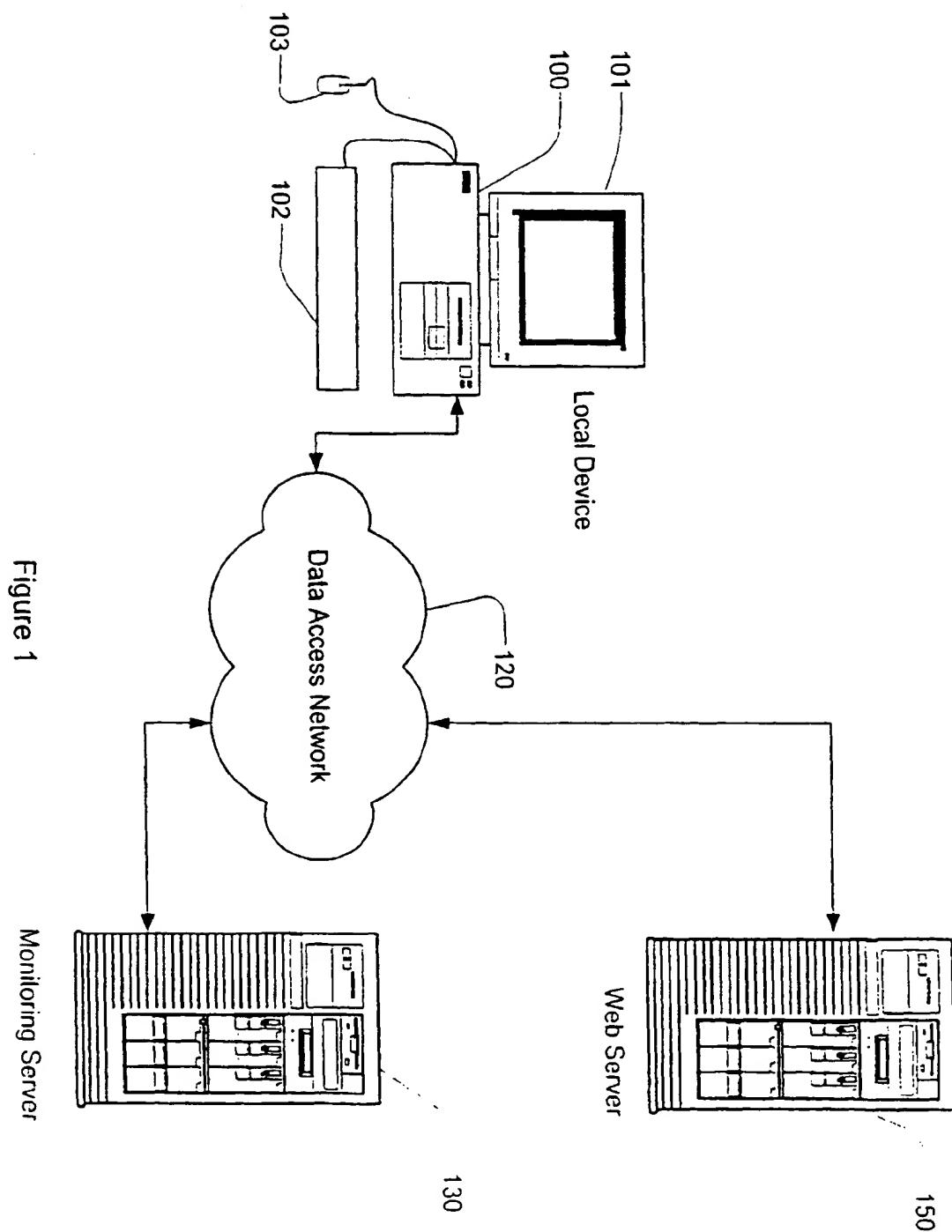
- obtain the keyword from the first resource locator string;
- transmit the obtained keyword to the

55

monitoring server.;

44. The computer program product comprising a computer usable medium having a client monitoring application for monitoring web browsing by a user of a local device as set forth in claim 40, wherein the client monitoring application transmits the monitoring information to the monitoring server in a coded format.

45. A local device comprising the computer program product comprising a computer usable medium having a client monitoring application of claim 40.



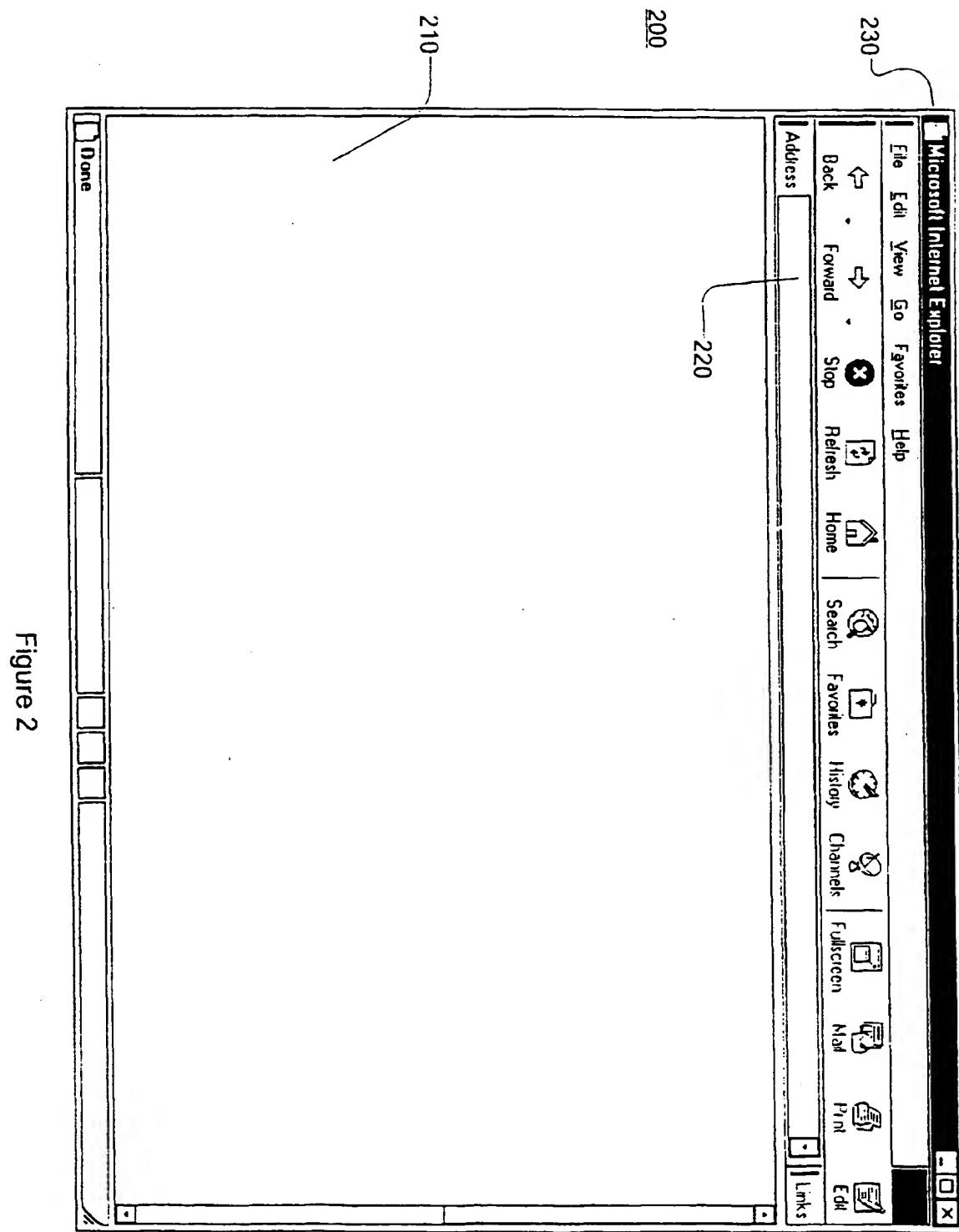
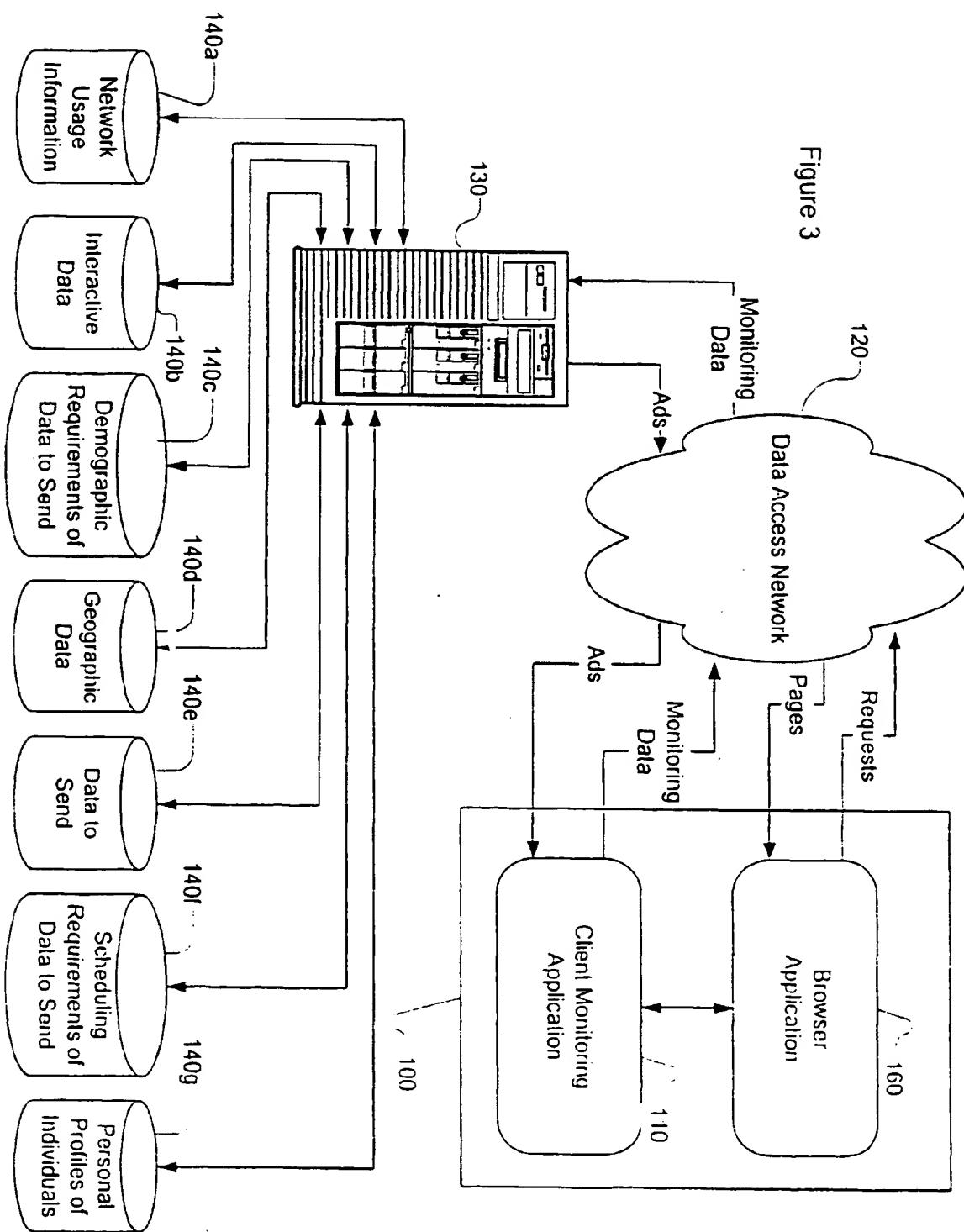


Figure 2

Figure 3



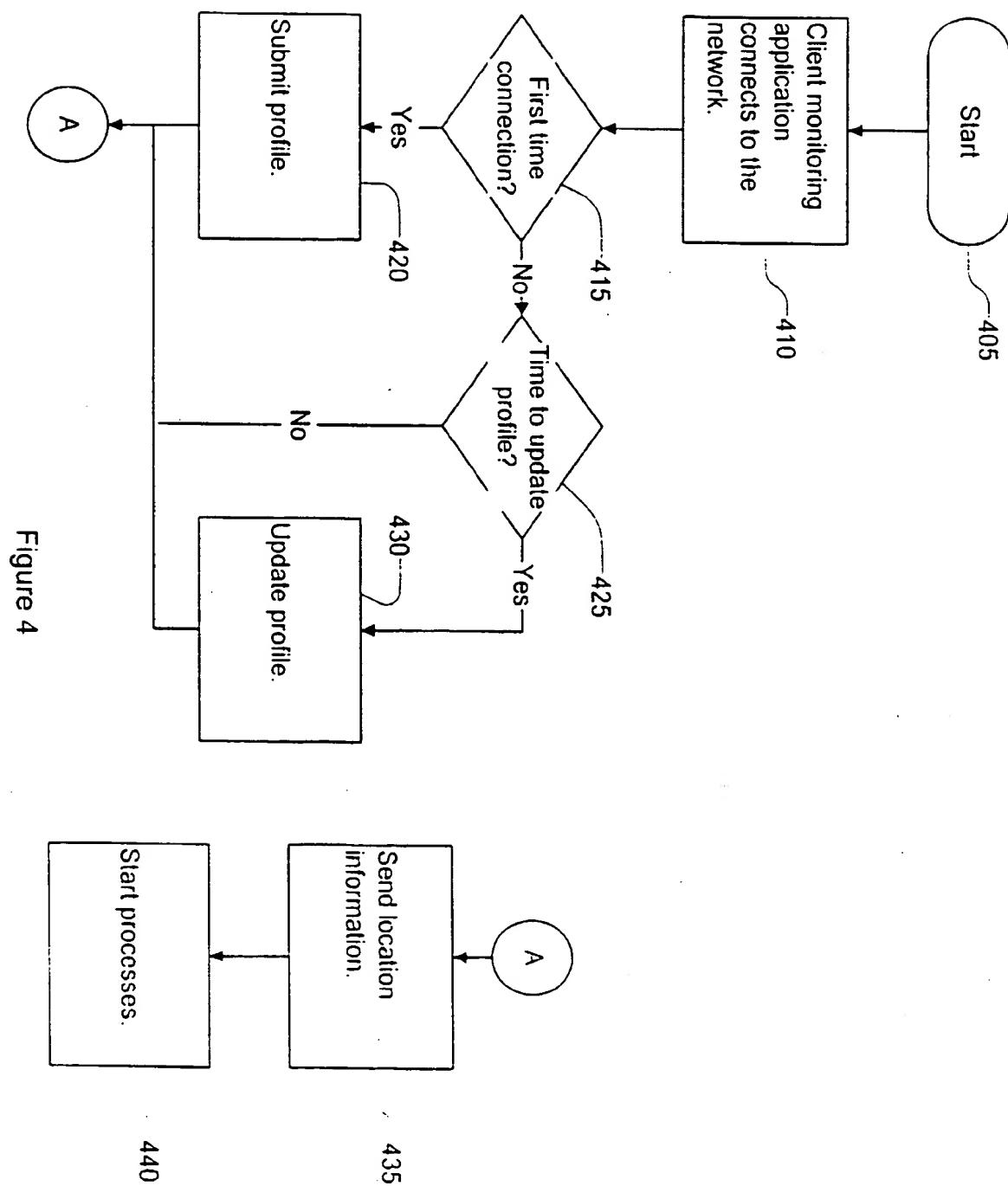


Figure 4

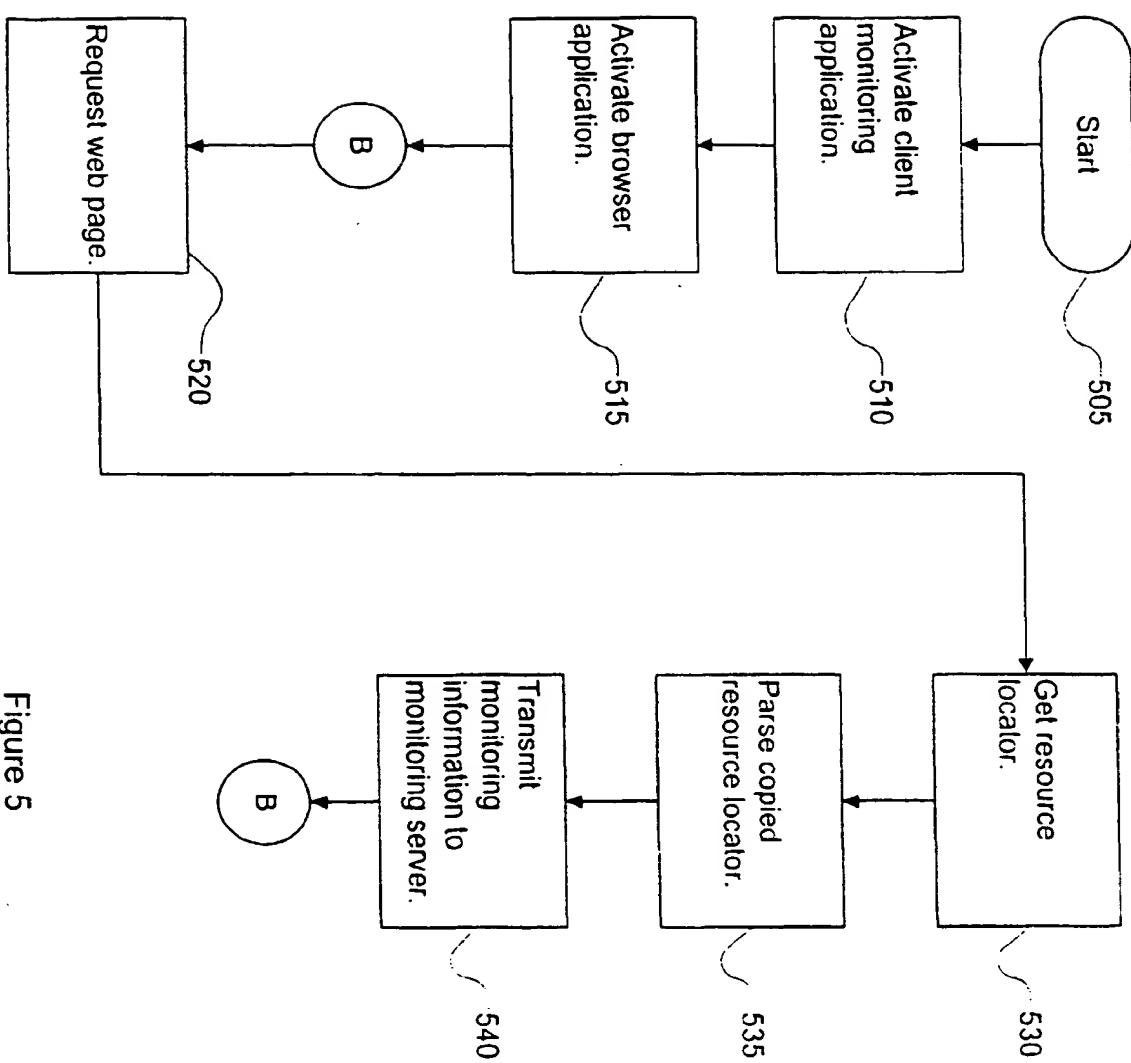


Figure 5

230

220

610

210

640

620

630

200

190

180

170

160

150

140

130

120

110

100

90

80

70

60

50

40

30

20

10

0

19

1045547A2_1>

Attel & Hadden LLP - Attorney Search - Microsoft Internet Explorer

File Edit View Go Favorites Help

Back Forward Stop Refresh Home

Address

SEARCH

Last Name:

First Name:

Law School:

Firm Name:

City:

County:

States/Provinces:

All States/Provinces

Alabama

Alaska

Multi-Select Tips

SEARCH

CLEAR

Return to Home Page

Done

Figure 6

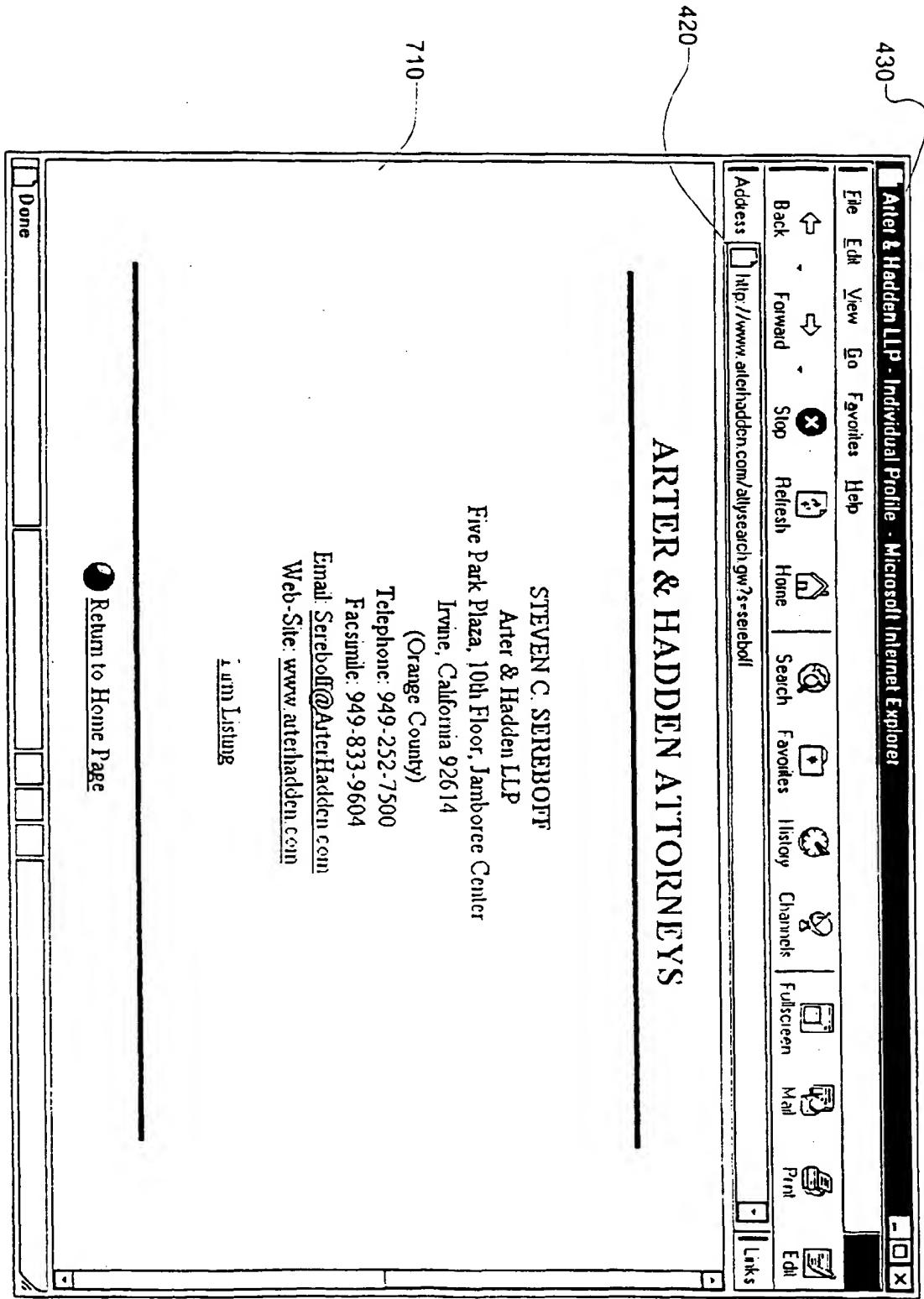


Figure 7

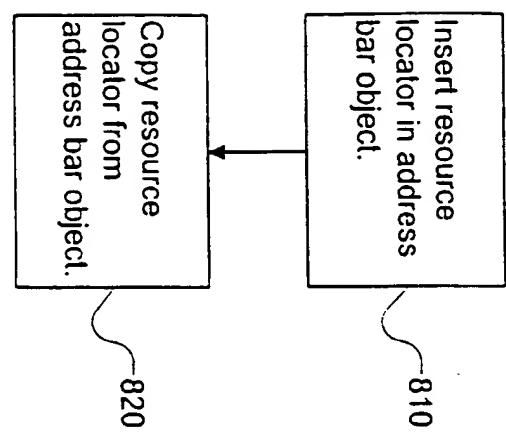


Figure 8A

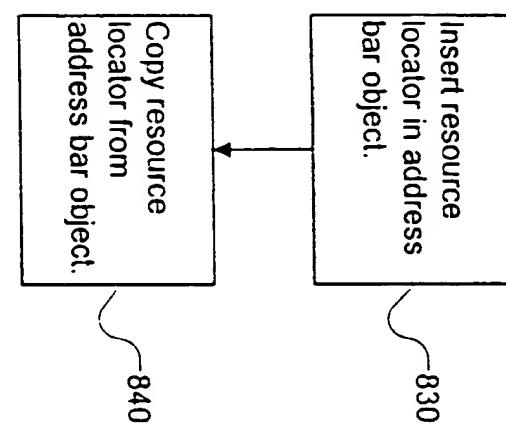


Figure 8B

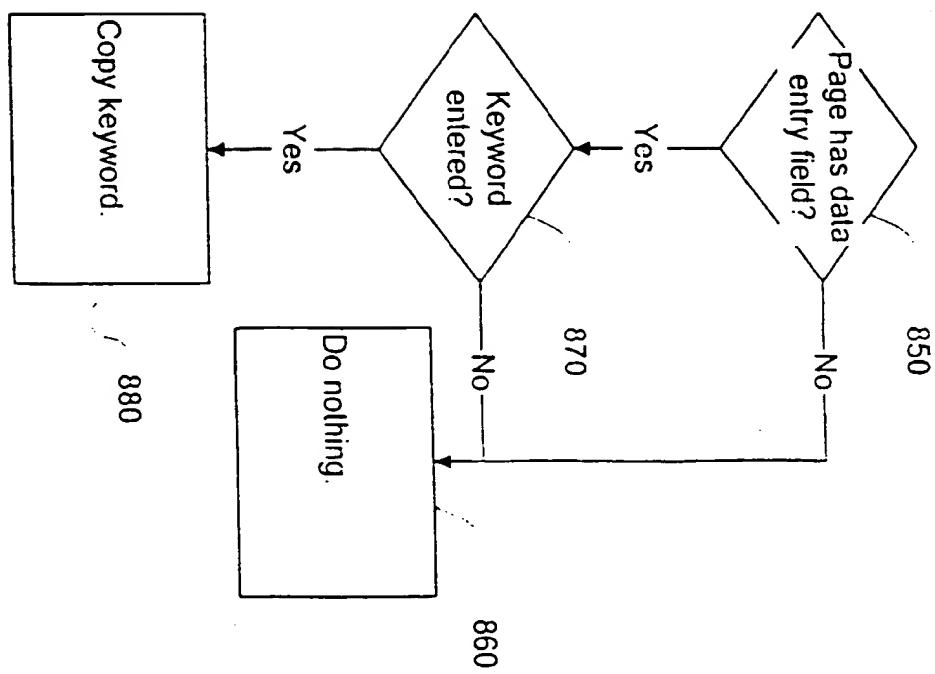
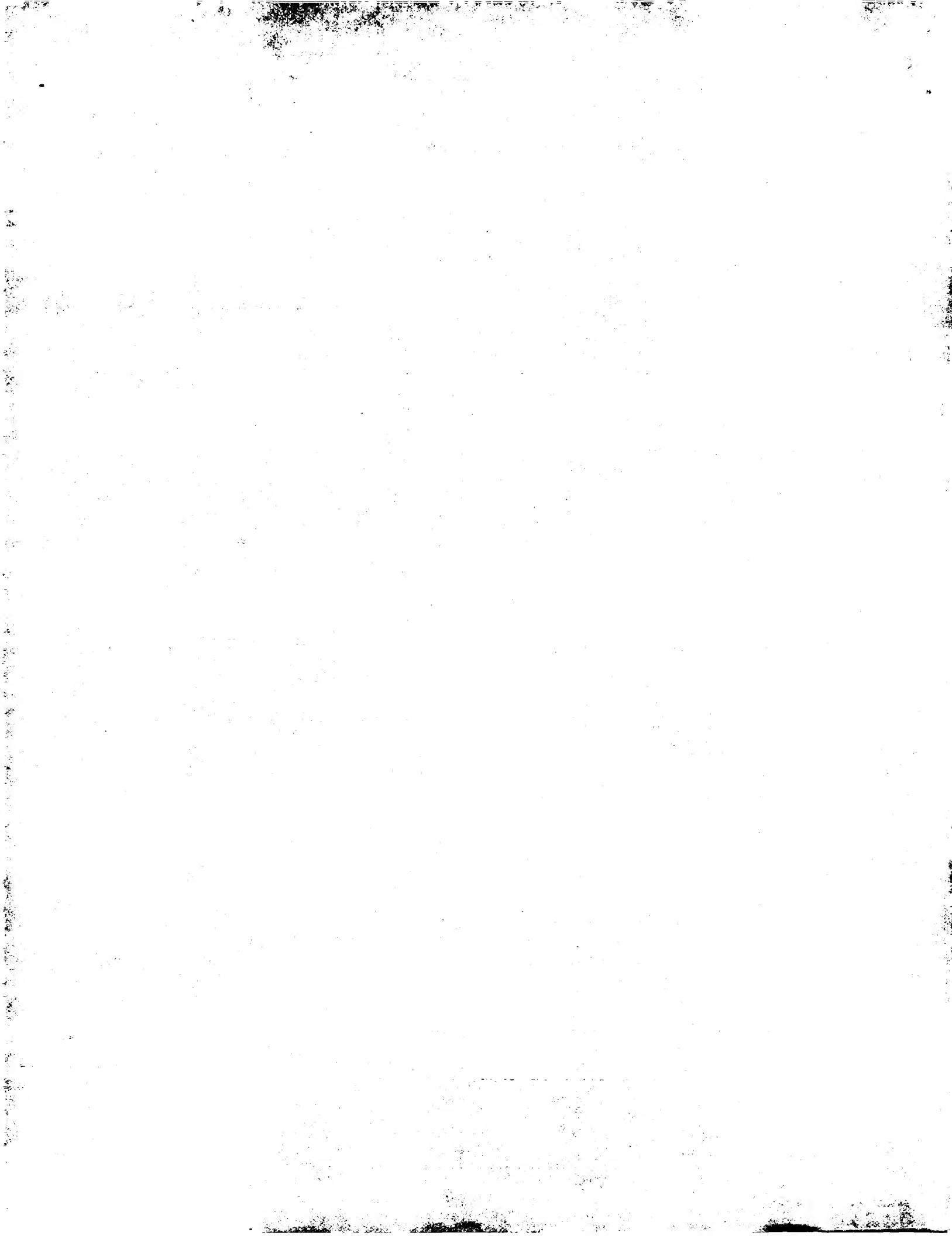


Figure 8C





(19)

Europäisches Patentamt
European Patent Office
Office européen des brevets



(11)

EP 1 045 547 A3

(12)

EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION

(88) Date of publication A3:
19.06.2002 Bulletin 2002/25

(51) Int Cl.7: G06F 17/60, H04L 29/06,
G06F 11/34

(43) Date of publication A2:
18.10.2000 Bulletin 2000/42

(21) Application number: 00301826.4

(22) Date of filing: 06.03.2000

(84) Designated Contracting States:
AT BE CH CY DE DK ES FI FR GB GR IE IT LI LU
MC NL PT SE

Designated Extension States:
AL LT LV MK RO SI

(30) Priority: 09.03.1999 US 324747
03.06.1999 US 349325

(71) Applicant: Netzero, Inc.
Westlake Village, California 91361 (US)

(72) Inventors:
• Haitsuka, Stacy
California (US)

- Zebian, Marwan
California (US)
- MacKenzie, Harold
California (US)
- Burr, Ronald
California (US)
- Warren, Terry
California (US)
- Blaser, Shane
California (US)

(74) Representative: Wombwell, Francis
Potts, Kerr & Co.
15, Hamilton Square
Birkenhead Merseyside CH41 6BR (GB)

(54) Monitoring of individual internet usage

(57) Disclosed is a device and method in which the on-line activities of an on-line user are monitored and stored. Information regarding the user's activities are used as a basis for targeting advertisements to the user. Monitoring is performed by a client monitoring application, which performs monitoring without intruding on the user's activities. According to one aspect of the invention,

URLs in the address bar of the browser application are obtained by the client monitoring application. According to another aspect of the invention, the stream of URLs transmitted by the browser application are obtained by the client monitoring application. According to another aspect of the invention, information in displayed web pages is obtained by the client monitoring application.

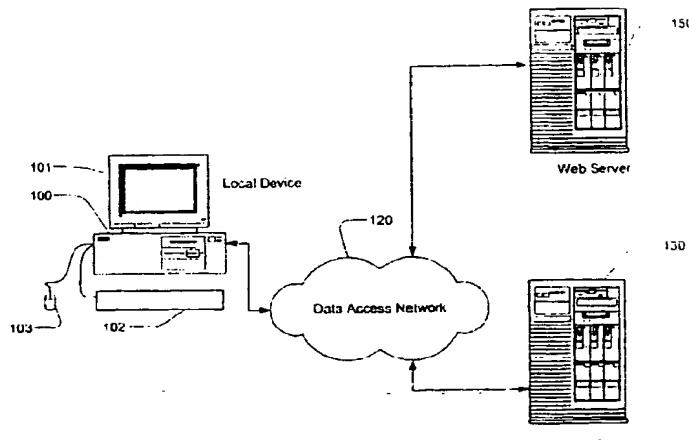


Figure 1



European Patent
Office

EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number

EP 00 30 1826

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT									
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.7)						
X	US 5 796 952 A (JAIN VIDYUT ET AL) 18 August 1998 (1998-08-18) * figure 6 * * column 4, line 3 - column 5, line 3 * * column 8, line 30 - line 52 * * column 16, line 10 - line 62 * ---	1-45	G06F17/60 H04L29/06 G06F11/34						
P, X	US 5 987 611 A (FREUND GREGOR) 16 November 1999 (1999-11-16) *Abstract* * column 4, line 29 - column 5, line 20 * ---	1-45							
A	HILBERT D M ET AL: "An approach to large-scale collection of application usage data over the internet" SOFTWARE ENGINEERING, 1998. PROCEEDINGS OF THE 1998 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON KYOTO, JAPAN 19-25 APRIL 1998, LOS ALAMITOS, CA, USA, IEEE COMPUT. SOC, US, 19 April 1998 (1998-04-19), pages 136-145, XP010276038 ISBN: 0-8186-8368-6 *Chapter 4* ---	1-45							
A	KURZKE C ET AL: "WebAssist: a user profile specific information retrieval assistant" COMPUTER NETWORKS AND ISDN SYSTEMS, NORTH HOLLAND PUBLISHING. AMSTERDAM, NL, vol. 30, no. 1-7, 1 April 1998 (1998-04-01), pages 654-655, XP004121364 ISSN: 0169-7552 *Abstract* -----	1-45	G06F H04L						
<p>The present search report has been drawn up for all claims</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 33%;">Place of search</td> <td style="width: 33%;">Date of completion of the search</td> <td style="width: 34%;">Examiner</td> </tr> <tr> <td>THE HAGUE</td> <td>29 April 2002</td> <td>Dubois, G</td> </tr> </table>				Place of search	Date of completion of the search	Examiner	THE HAGUE	29 April 2002	Dubois, G
Place of search	Date of completion of the search	Examiner							
THE HAGUE	29 April 2002	Dubois, G							
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS		T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document							
X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document									

ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT
ON EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION NO.

EP 00 30 1826

This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned European search report. The members are as contained in the European Patent Office EDP file on The European Patent Office is in no way liable for these particulars which are merely given for the purpose of information.

29-04-2002

Patent document cited in search report		Publication date		Patent family member(s)		Publication date
US 5796952	A	18-08-1998		AU 727170 B2		07-12-2000
				AU 6573198 A		20-10-1998
				BR 9808033 A		05-09-2000
				CN 1251669 T		26-04-2000
				EP 1010116 A2		21-06-2000
				JP 2000514942 T		07-11-2000
				US 2002040395 A1		04-04-2002
				WO 9843380 A2		01-10-1998
				US 6138155 A		24-10-2000
US 5987611	A	16-11-1999	NONE			

THIS PAGE BLANK (USPTO)